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ABSTRACT

Presented are a strategy for recording observations of preschool children, documentation of the strategy in use in a nursery school, and thoughts on the importance of observing for curriculum planning, teacher-parent conferences, and professionalism. The system of documentation includes a daily attendance record, written observations on children's behavior, and a developmental chart on each child. Examples of strategy use consist of three profiles of cases in which a preschool teacher turned to her written records for help in dealing with the problems of excessive absences, a child's need for an extra year of preschool in order to develop social skills, and the inappropriate placement of a child in a developmental kindergarten on the basis of borderline performance on one task on a screening test. Numerous illustrations of actual records supplement the discussion. (RH)

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TAKING NOTE: THE IMPORTANCE OF DOCUMENTING STUDENT PROGRESS IN A PRESCHOOL SETTING

by

Merry Ellen Scofield

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

TAKING NOTE: AN INTRODUCTION..... 2

A STRATEGY FOR OBSERVATION AND RECORDING..... 4

DOCUMENTATION IN USE.....11

Phillip: A Three year Old.....11

Matt: A Very Young Four Year Old.....12

Andy: A Four Year Old.....13

THE IMPORTANCE OF TAKING NOTE.....18

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

i Example of daily list of absences in planning book... 5

ii Sample page of written observations..... 6

iii Bryan's recitation: a written observation..... 7

iv Blank developmental chart.....10

v Example of Phillip's degree of absences.....15

vi Written observations on Matt - early in year.....16

vii Andy's developmental chart.....17

TAKING NOTE: AN INTRODUCTION

It had been a particularly hard morning. One of my parent aides had spent her time hovering around the coffee maker, and an early snow had played havoc with my bulb planting project. The lack of help and the change in plans had made the eighteen four year olds under my care more of a teaching challenge than usual. I had the urge to put my feet up on the children's clay table and take a nap before the afternoon session.

Instead, I made myself comfortable (at a table and chair not possibly meant for grown-ups), opened up a spiral notebook, and began to take note - my daily routine of jotting down class observations - some from memory, some from scraps of paper.

"(Matt has) definitely found friends..a mixed blessing"

"Bryan very conscious of 'needing' name on art work."

"...(Shannon) slipped in block area, clean fall."

Remembering an incident that happened during snack time, I drew a line through "counts 10 objects" on Kurt's development chart, noting the date; and similar lines through "gallops smoothly" on seven other charts. Leafing through my information, I wrote a memo to next week's parent aides to please bring a snack the children could spread on crackers. I double-checked my morning attendance record.

The pastor, from whose church the Cooperative rented its

space, walked into the nursery for a chat. I closed my notebook with the satisfaction of a job completed, and took advantage of his adult company for the rest of my break.

A STRATEGY FOR OBSERVATION AND RECORDING

I kept very few notes on the children my first year of teaching preschool, but as my interest in my profession increased so did my need for written documentation of the children's progress.

Since that first year of teaching I have slowly devised a system of documentation that fits my purposes. I now keep three types of written information on the children in my classes. First, a simple list of absences in my planning book (figure i) is used as a time-saving daily attendance record. A standard attendance sheet can then be filled in periodically throughout the year, and at my leisure.

Second, I maintain a spiral notebook for written observations (figure ii). I maintain a page or two for every child in the class, and I try to include not only information about minor accidents and learning problems, but also bits of humor or insight that help me see each child as an individual (figure iii). Each observation is dated and as specific as possible. There tend to be fewer written observations made as the year progresses and I know the children better. I sometimes have to remind myself as we get further into the semester to write down anecdotes that, at the time, I'm sure I'll remember forever.

Subject
Text
Time

CHAD ★ JOINED US TODAY (8) MON

BIBBOTS etc Page: 5

STENCILS OUT - POPCLAND

WEEK OF ↙	NOTES		
MON 10-8	ABSENT- WESLEY KEITH ROXANNA SHANNON	PIANO: NO NO DOLLS NO WORKBNH NO WHEELS	FREE PLAY: planted crowned picked leaved ↓ waked- arrangement (ice cream cup, acorns) LEON HERE WITH "EYE STUFF"
TUE 10-9	ALL HERE Douglas Pellin visiting Jennifer absent with Dougl (10)	FREE PLAY: clay water stencils no wkbnch no dolls	SNACK: ✓ PIANO: TRUCK, CAR BOOK 5 little Puppies. 5. Crow MOVEMENT: Hoot Owls Ghost / WALK OUTSIDE SEE "SAW" DISMISSAL: BAZAAR
WED 10-10	DENTIST HYG GAIL LIEBROCK ABSENT- KEITH SHANNON CHARLIE	PIANO: NO	FREE PLAY: water table stencils, etc Brought in T: Os plastic helmets no workbench no dolls Wilmet - "cereal" (INSTANT pudding cereal)
THU 10-11	DENTIST GAIL LIEBROCK ALL HERE DOUGLAS OFFICIALLY STARTED TODAY (CAME THRU and VISITED)	FREE PLAY: Stencils, etc water table no wkbnch no dolls	SNACK: ✓ early 10:15 PIANO: Aunt Liebrock - 10:30 talking re healthcare MOVEMENT: walk outside - Got rake GOODNIGHT MOON DISMISSAL: Parent KIDS GOOD DOUG IN BLOCK ROOM
FRI 10-12	ABSENT- KEITH (LATE) CHARLIE	PIANO: NO - brought new hand Cards (no one noticed except (NIKI) "LOOK AT THE TURTLES"	FREE PLAY: orange taller candy (no one noticed) water table Stencils, etc. (games popular from there) NO WKBNCH NO DOLLS

Figure i: Example of daily list of absences in planning book. Absences all listed on left side of page intitled "NOTES".

1st Day - really matured in last year. He will behave as any one in class (better than most) Got into the routine again well.

9-16: Keyboard - ran through 1-10 note first time then 1, 2, 4, 8 then 1, 2, 1, 2 / knew rest. I hope... "most" attention not with me

11-9: Worked with Lauri # puzzle. Have random answers to "what # is" 5, 3, 4 but known 1 (and could give one peg) one knew 2! (we had talked about 2 in Talking Time & written numeral on board - when asked "what #" I watched his eyes go to the board look to #, then gave correct answer & correct # of pegs. He's thinking!!

11-28. Good at making Tornado chain. (cut/paste) counted Counted do 4 for me!!!

1-9-84 - his group & art area activity (my choice) Jerry worked at clay activity here "(pizza → cake with frosting, very fine, & knew less than last time I saw him) & 2 or more.

1-11-84 Had a bad day. D.S. pushed him in a block crate & he cut his finger on something on a record. They were gone 5 min later (out of the "space shuttle" & on to the floor with the wood blocks please.) At end of class he & Dustin on the carpet. (Dustin said he want be my friend, etc.) We talked about how sad he can be when their parents work (Andrew Doe Hare) seemed O.K. when went home.

Figure ii: Sample page of written observations.

10-24 Sat at clay table with Bryan today.
Looked me straight in the eye and
recited -

Darkness falls across the land
The midnight hour is close at hand
Creatures crawl in search of blood
To ~~Terror~~ terrorize your neighborhood.

Said to Kris - my goodness the kid
knows Shakespeare!

That's not Shakespeare Kris laughed -
it's Michael Jackson.

10-24: Sat at clay table with Bryan today.
Looked me straight in the eye and
recited -

Darkness falls across the land
The midnight hour is close at hand
Creatures crawl in search of blood
To terrorize your neighborhood.

Said to Kris [parent aide] - my goodness, the kid
knows Shakespeare!

That's not Shakespeare - Kris laughed -
It's Michael Jackson.

[This from a child, who at three and a half, knew one color, two numbers, wouldn't have recognized his name if you pointed it out to him, and had trouble getting the words to "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" down right.
This observation proved two things: 1) I didn't know Shakespeare from Michael Jackson, and 2) given a subject of interest, Bryan had excellent listening and retention skills 7

Figure iii: Bryan's recitation: a written observation with typed transcript and explanation.

Third, I use a developmental chart for each child throughout the entire school year and continuing into the second year for my returning students (figure iv).

I designed the chart to fit my individual needs, and based it on published material, my own experiences and education, and common sense. I produced it knowing that it must be -

1) easy enough to utilize during or right after class

2) simple

3) valid

4) usable in our preschool's center with it's available equipment

5) casual enough so that parents (who are all there at one time or another) don't feel that their child is in a testing situation.

I very rarely have the developmental charts out during class, unless I am doing a concentrated amount of work on one child. I know the information on the charts well enough that I can scribble little memos to myself as I notice a child succeed or struggle at a specific skill. I can then copy the information onto his chart later. A few minutes of active observing while the children work or participate in grouptime gives me a good deal of information for my charts each day.

My system of documentation - the daily attendance, the written observations, and the developmental charts - is only one of any number of ways early childhood educators can and do keep records on their young students. The method is not nearly as important as the actual doing, but it must be a system that works

comfortably for the individual teacher in his or her given preschool setting.

DEV.	25-36 months 2 YEARS	37-48 months 3 YEARS	49-60 months 4 YEARS	61-70 months 5 YEARS
LANG.& SPEECH	all vowels,p,b,m,t,d,n,w,h.....	.....	uses k,g,y,ng.....	front f,v sounds (unstable: j,th,sh;zh,s,l,z,ch,r,wh)
	begins use of plurals.....	uses inflection.....	uses 2 syllable words selects 2 rhymes of 3 syll....	knows opposites
	uses 2 word sentences.....	uses 4-6 word sentences.....	uses 4-8 word sentences.....	consistent 4-8 word sent.
FINE MOTOR SKILLS	builds 6 blk tower.....	builds copy 3 blk bridge..... builds 8 blk tower	builds copy 5 blk bridge builds 10 pce vert.structure	
	inserts peg in board.....	.....	imitates 4 peg pattern.....	reproduces pegboard shapes
	threads 3 large beads.....	.....	strings 10 beads in 2 min.	
	copies V stroke.....	approx.circle..... copies H,N,+ copies 5 capital letters	copies X..... copies 5" square prints first name	prints full name copies 2 short words
	pours from small pitcher 70%...	pours from small pitcher 100%..	pours from various containers	
	attempts finger grasp on large crayons 60%.....	cuts without tearing 80%..... pastes using pointerfinger	cuts 4"line,X"limits 50%..... cuts simple picture (car)	cuts interior pce of paper 75%
GROSS MOTOR	catched rolled ball.....	catches 9" ball 80%.....	catches large ball from 6' 4 of 5.....	(both hands O.K.) catches tennis ball 2 of 3
	throws small obj.2'standing....	copies underhand 4'.....	throws ball (one hand) 18'....	throws ball:44'boys 25'girls
	walks on tiptoes 6 steps.....	.....	gallops smoothly/skips 4 times..	skips smoothly
	walks 10' (lines 8"apart).....	steps on ft print pattern (correct L/R).... somersault with aid.....	walks 4"wide balance beam..... somersaults	walks 2" balance beam
COGNITIVE	identifies one primary color...	identifies 3 primary colors... points and names 3 shapes75%..	names 5 colors.....	names 8 colors identifies 3 shapes in environment 100
	repeats 2 or 3 digits.....	points and counts to 4/5.....	counts 10 objects.....	counts and writes 0-10
	refers to self by name.....	gives first,last name 90%.....	.....	gives parents name 100% address/phone 100%
	indicates age by fingers.....	.....	gives age verbally..... 5-8 pce puzzle in 10 min.....	gives age,birthdate 100% 6-8 pce puzzle,15 min.100%
SELF CARE	urinates by self/wipes aided...	reg.toilet needs byself 60%... night control	goes to toilet unassisted	
	drinks from glass (no spills)..	eats-spoon,fork,cup 80%..... serves self from dish 80%	spreads/cuts with knife..... clears table when asked	prepares simple foods and puts away mat.unaided 100% (cereals, sandwiches)
	puts on jacket/shoes with aid.. puts lace through eyelet	puts on jacket 100%/shoes 70%..	zips front/buttons laces and ties shoes	
SOCIAL SKILLS	observes others.....	participates in group play....	sings with group 90%..... listens to story 10 min.....	responds in group sit.90% listens to story 15 min.
		remains at table through meal.	.....	will remain seated 10 min.
	plays alone 60%.....	engages coop.play 2-3 children	.....	engages in coop.play 80%
	leaves parent for nursery school without fuss 90%...	.....	accepts routines,changes(2min) copes with unfamiliar sit.....	speaks freely to new adult
		finishes familiar tasks 50% shares toys 75%.....	picks up,puts away toys 50% expresses anger verbally 80%	

Figure iv: Blank developmental chart.

DOCUMENTATION IN USE

Phillip: A Three Year Old

Phillip joined the nursery school as a three year old at the beginning of our Fall session, but as the weather got colder we saw less and less of him. It didn't take an attendance sheet to tell me he was missing a lot of school; by March, he was still having trouble [from written observations] "focusing on any one activity during Free Play...has trouble getting into the routine of things."

While taking her turn as parent aide in the early Spring, Phillip's mother became impatient with her son's inability to join in the singing and fingerplays. That incident initiated a conversation with her after class. I indicated that Phillip's problems possibly stemmed from his large number of absences, and actually showed her in the attendance record that he had, by count, missed 50% of the year to date (figure v).

The parent was somewhat surprised by the percentage, and made indications that it was hard getting out of her backroad when the weather was poor, and that the baby had been sick a great deal.

Whatever the reasons, seeing the actual number of absences and realizing its effect on Phillip's ability to function in school, seemed to have made a difference. Phillip's attendance

improved immediately, and when he returned the next Fall he was able to maintain an average attendance record the entire school year.

Matt: A Very Young Four Year Old

With a November 29th Birthday, Matt was, by far, the youngest member in a class of four year old students.

I had observed him closely since the beginning of the school year, and had become increasingly concerned about his abilities to work with the other children. He was simply very young.

A few months into the session, Matt's mother approached me with the same concerns that I had been feeling. She agreed that Matt probably needed an extra year of preschool to develop his social behavior, but was having difficulty convincing Matt's father, who felt that giving Matt an extra year meant his child was "dumb".

I supported the mother's efforts, and showed her written observations that confirmed her instincts (figure vi).

Matt's parents continued to discuss the problem at home, but by January had made a firm decision to give Matt the extra time he needed.

Matt returned to our preschool the following Fall, now the oldest member in a class of four year olds - and he fit in beautifully.

ANDY: A Four Year Old

A week after school let out for the summer, I got a call from the mother of one of my four year old students. Andy, who had turned five in May, had gone through the Kindergarten screening test unsuccessfully. The school counselor was recommending the newly formed developmental Kindergarten program for him, and Andy's mother was scheduled to meet again with the counselor that day.

Although I had agreed with the school counselor on the placement of one of Andy's preschool classmates, I was surprised that Andy would have been considered. I brought my notebooks to the phone, and went over Andy's developmental chart (figure vii) with his parent.

She was unaware of exactly what Andy had had difficulty with during the screening. I told her that the children were given seven tests: vocabulary, visual reception, visual motor integration, receptive language, auditory sequential memory, gross motor and perceptual motor, running speed and agility. Neither of us could believe he'd had trouble with any language or gross motor activity. His chart indicated that his weakest area was in small hand-eye activities, such as printing his name.

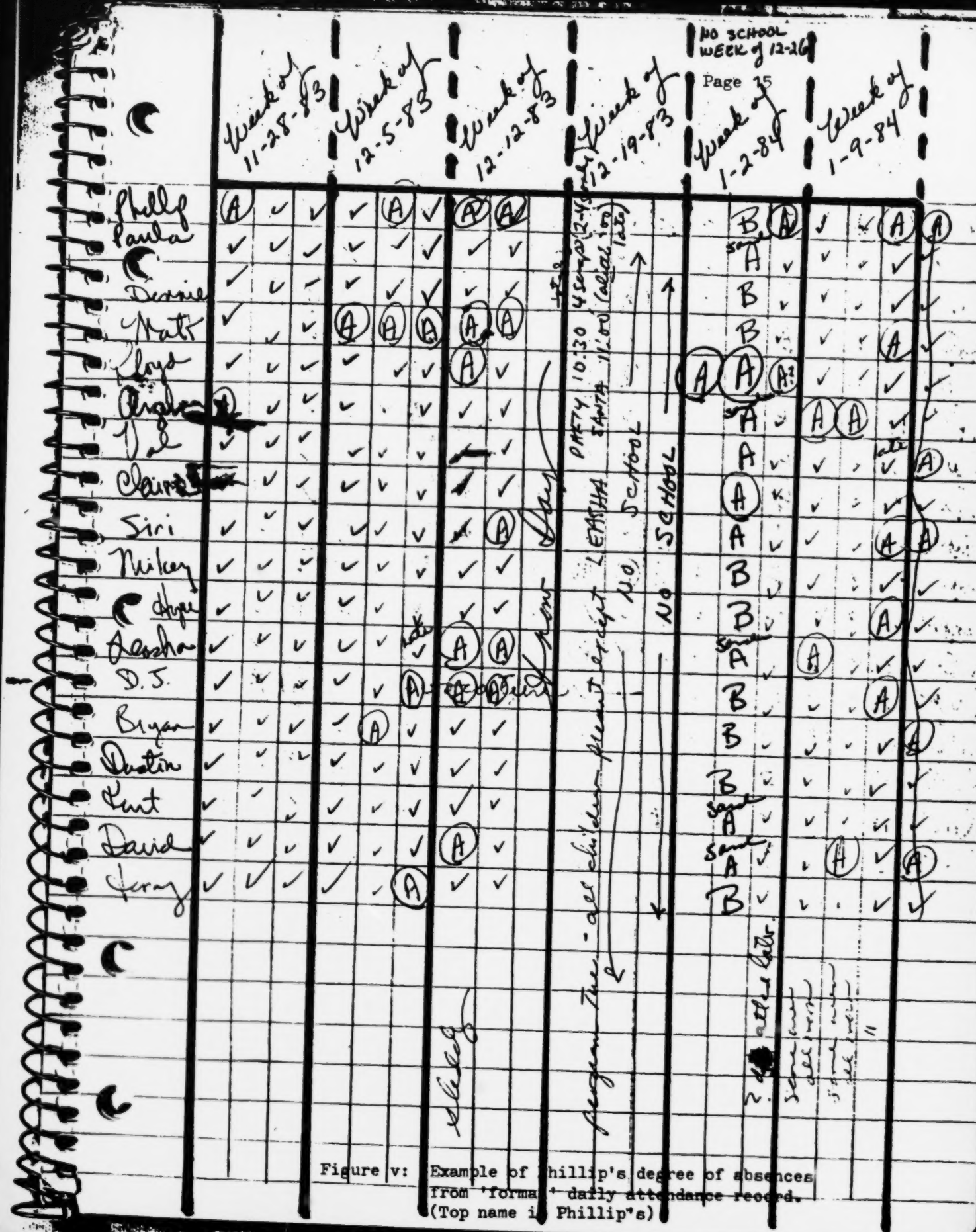
I attached this weakness to Andy's lack of interest in fine motor activities, and felt that the problem was not unusual for a four or five year old boy. I stood by my conviction that Andy was ready for Kindergarten. I advised the mother to ask the school counselor very specific questions on what his

recommendations had been based.

Reassured, (she had been as surprised as I by the counselor's recommendation), Andy's mother went back to the second conference armed with information and my support. She learned that Andy had done poorly on the visual motor integration portion of the testing; a section requiring him to copy series of dots in particular shapes (for example, three dots arranged to form a triangle); in essence, a skill very similar to copying letters. When the parent questioned if the score had been very poor, the counselor admitted that it had been borderline, and that Andy had handled all other portions of the test adequately.

Andy was accepted into Kindergarten.

I was able to talk to his mother the following summer. "Kindergarten," she smiled, "went GREAT."


Week of 11-28-83
Week of 12-5-83
Week of 12-12-83
Week of 12-19-83
NO SCHOOL WEEK of 12-26
Week of 1-2-84
Week of 1-9-84
Page 35
Phillip
Paula
Denise
Mark
Lloyd
Angela
Joel
Claire
Siri
Mikey
Angie
Keesha
D.J.
Bryan
Dustin
Kent
David
Jeremy
PARTY 10:30
SANTA 11:00 (also 12:00)
4 songs (2-4 only)
LENGTH
NO SCHOOL
NO SCHOOL
Jeremy Tues - per children present at that time
Sang
Sang
Sang

Mathew

4 a.m. class

Mathew T.

b.- Nov. 21, 1978

Roger and (Liz) ... Lucas (about 3) and baby

Notes on last year (4 a.m. class)

9-10-82 "color help"

9-10-82 "Matt and Josh H - watch! when together. Matt seems to need help in constructive play (kicking down blocks, etc.)"

9-13-82 "needs help with (constructive) play, help with settling, etc. in group"

9-20-82 "if he sees anyone else - for ex. laying down during group - he's down! / or being rough with blocks..."

9-20-82 "unable (or unwilling) to identify "toys" more specifically as blocks or hats or..."

9-24-82 "Matt Hansell's mom worried that Matt wasn't 'doing anything', all he mentioned was kicking down the blocks"

10-22-82 "responded to first head during group"

Figure vi: Written observations on Matt - early in year examplifying social behavior problems in class.

Figure vii: Andy's developmental chart during year in "Four Year Old" class.

DEV.	25-36 months 2 YEARS	37-48 months 3 YEARS	49-60 months 4 YEARS	61-70 months 5 YEARS
LANG.& SPEECH	all vowels,p,b,m,t,d,n,w,h.....	.....	uses k,g,y,ng.....	front f,v sounds (unstable: j,th,sh;zh,s,l,z,ch,r,wh) N/K
	begins use of plurals.....	uses inflection.....	~~uses 2 syllable words~~ 3-85 ~~selects 2 rhymes of 3 syll.~~....	knows opposites
	uses 2 word sentences.....	uses 4-6 word sentences.....	uses 4-8 word sentences.....	~~consistent 4-8 word sent.~~
FINE MOTOR SKILLS	builds 6 blk tower.....	builds copy 3 blk bridge..... builds 8 blk tower	~~builds copy 5 blk bridge~~ ~~builds 10 pce vert.structure~~	
	inserts peg in board.....	.....	imitates 4 peg pattern. N/K	reproduces pegboard shapes
	threads 5 large beads.....	.....	strings 10 beads in 2 min. N/K	
	copies V stroke.....	approx.circle..... copies H,N,+ copies 5 capital letters	~~copies X~~..... copies 5" square 1-85 prints first name A-n-d-will	prints full name N/K copies 2 short words N/K quickly & neat · X - copies 25-85
	pours from small pitcher 70%....	pours from small pitcher 100%.	~~pours from various containers~~	
	attempts finger grasp on large crayons 60%....	cuts without tearing 80%..... pastes using pointerfinger	~~cuts 4"line,X"limits 50%~~ 1-85 80% ~~cuts simple picture (car)~~	cuts interior pce of paper 75%
GROSS MOTOR	catched rolled ball.....	catches 9" ball 80%.....	catches large ball from 6' 4 of 5.....	(both hands O.K.) catches tennis ball 2 of 3
	throws small obj.2'standing....	copies underhand 4'.....	throws ball ~~(one hand)~~ 18'..2-85 X 1-85 X 2-4-85	throws ball:44'boys 25'girls
	walks on tiptoes 6 steps.....	.....	~~gallops smoothly~~/skips 4 times X 2-11-85	skips smoothly N/K
	walks 10' (lines 8"apart).....	steps on ft print pattern (correct L/R)... somersault with aid.....	walks 4"wide balance beam..... X 1-85 ~~somersaults~~ K 2-4-85	~~walks 2" balance beam~~ X 2-11-85
COGNITIVE	identifies one primary color... 1-9-85	identifies 3 primary colors.... points and names 3 shapes75%..	names 5 colors.....	names 8 colors 1-9-85 identifies 3 shapes in environment 100%
	repeats 2 or 3 digits.....	points and counts to 4/5.....	~~counts 10 objects~~..... 1-9-85	counts and writes 0-10
	refers to self by name.....	~~gives first,last name 90%~~ N/K 1-9-85	.....	~~gives parents name 100%~~ 1-9-85 address/phone 100% N/K 1-9-85
	indicates age by fingers.....	.....	~~gives age verbally~~..... 1-9-85 5-8 pce puzzle in 10 min.	~~gives age~~,birthdate 100% 6-8 pce puzzle,15 min.100%
SELF CARE	urinates by self/wipes aided...	reg.toilet needs byself 60%... night control	goes to toilet unassisted ✓	
	drinks from glass (no spills)..	eats-spoon,fork,cup 80%..... serves self from dish 80%	spreads/cuts with knife..... ✓ clears table when asked ✓	prepares simple foods and puts away mat.unaided 100% (cereals, sandwiches) N/K
	puts on jacket/shoes with aid.. puts lace through eyelet	puts on jacket 100%/shoes 70%.	X 11-84 zips front/buttons laces and ties shoes	
SOCIAL SKILLS	observes others.....	participates in group play....	sings with group 90%..... listens to story 10 min. ✓.....	responds in group sit.90% ✓ listens to story 15 min. ✓
		remains at table through meal.	.....	will remain seated 10 min. ✓
	plays alone 60%.....	engages coop.play 2-3 children	.....	engages in coop.play 80% ✓ 1-85
	leaves parent for nursery school without fuss 90%...	..... finishes familiar tasks 50% shares toys 75%.....	accepts routines changes(2min) ✓ copes with unfamiliar sit. ✓..... picks up,puts away toys 50% ✓ expresses anger verbally 80% ✓	speaks freely to new adult ✓

THE IMPORTANCE OF TAKING NOTE

The cases of Phillip, Matt, and Andy were three times in a two year span when I actually, and literally, turned to my written material for help in dealing with a problem. Those three boys were not, of course, my only students, but three children among the 70 that I taught during that period. The great majority of those children came and went without any specific need for all that information I had so carefully recorded. And it is possible that even without such records I would have been successful in making my point with the three parents detailed above.

Of course I do use record keeping as more than a problem-solving tool.

Documentation, and in particular, the developmental charts, assist me in curriculum planning. A glance through the charts reminds me of skills we haven't stressed, or of activities the children might enjoy. It reconfirms my knowledge of child development by verifying my casual observations that one child is somewhat delayed in gross motor, or another above the norm in dexterity or spatial relations.

Positive written observations make excellent introductions at teacher-parent conferences. Parents appreciate hearing something pleasant and personal about their pride-and-joy.

Parents at conference time also tend to mention incidents from months back ("Remember when Johnny came to school upset?...") and turning to my notes can make a good impression ("Oh, yes. He was upset, but..." or "He must have been fine by the time he said hello, or I'd have mentioned it in my notebook. What was the problem?").

But by far, the reason I keep documentation, over and above its use as a conference or curriculum aide, or as a problem-solving tool, is because it fulfills my need to act professionally.

Professionals, in any career field, keep records. Preschool teachers can be no different. The area of early childhood education is in a state of transition. Although preschool teachers can often match or surpass the training of other educators, teachers instructing below the Kindergarten level are still treated as second class citizens by most of their professional peers.

It is the responsibility, then, of all of us in early childhood education to maintain top standards. We have to be willing and able to SHOW what we know - about our field and about the children we teach. Had the school counselor asked Andy's mother for more evidence of his Kindergarten readiness, I had that information in writing.

Keeping records takes time, and the effort can often seem pointless when a teacher is tired or discouraged. But it is imperative to early childhood education that those of us claiming to be part of its discipline understand the importance of

documentation. We 'take note' not only to benefit ourselves and our students, but to help insure a better future for our profession.